



# Building Safety in Wooster

2017 Annual Report  
City of Wooster Building Standards Division

**Building Standards Division Mission:** To protect the public from hazards incidental to the design, erection, repair, demolition or use and occupancy of all buildings or structures and to ensure the safe and sanitary maintenance of existing buildings using effective code enforcement while providing open communication, courtesy, and respect.

# Letter from the Chief Building Official

---

Each time we go to work, shop, eat at a downtown restaurant, or send our kids to school we take for granted the building will be safe and the building will not make us sick. We take building safety for granted. Successful code enforcement in Wooster means protecting the health and safety of the public by ensuring safe buildings, and yet there is more. Our work also impacts community development. All things being equal, studies show investment flows to communities with an efficient and customer focused permitting process. Our work is an important part of what makes Wooster a great place to live. Wooster indeed is a great place to live. We had impressive accolades for 2017 including Ohio Magazine: “Best Hometown 2017”, Money Magazine: 37th of “Top 100 Places to live in the United States”, and the Financial Times: “#4 FDi Strategy for Top Micro American Cities of the Future.”

In this report, I will present the activity of the division while identifying trends and opportunities. I hope you will take the time to appreciate the work behind the statistics. For example, in 2017 we became one of the few paperless building departments in the country. Think of the obstacles and challenges we overcame. Imagine the work of inspectors who spent hundreds of hours and felt personally responsible making sure complex healthcare projects such as the Wooster Community Hospital addition, Danbury Senior Living expansion and the new Avenue at Wooster nursing facility comply with the codes.

I encourage you to ask questions to learn more about our activity. I welcome your comments and suggestions so together we can continue to improve our important work.

Sincerely,



Tim Monea, CBO  
Building Standards Manager

# \$1,098,055,969

Value of construction in Wooster in the last 20 years is over one billion

---

## 24,000

Permits Issued in the last 20 years

## 60,000

Inspections made since 1997

---

## 1,700

Permits issued in 2017

## 3,400

Inspections made in 2017

---

# \$86,946,213

Value of construction in Wooster in 2017

## **City of Wooster Building Standards Division Significant 2017 Accomplishments**

- **Online Permitting went live January 1, 2017.** Functioned as a “paperless” office using a cloud-based permitting system. Applications were completed online, and inspection requests, permits, receipts, reports, and other documents were issued as a pdf. Over 25,000 sheets of paper were saved, and countless full-size plan sheets have also been foregone. A public kiosk was set up to aid users without internet access. Also, the City’s Engineering, Recreation, and Utility Divisions also utilized ViewPoint Cloud to process permits and applications. Also, the Building Standards and Planning and Zoning Divisions have redesigned the City’s parking permit program and transitioned the program to an online process that will begin during 2018.
- **Major Construction Projects in 2017:** Daisy cottage cheese production expansion, Gojo facility expansion, College of Wooster projects, Milltown professional building alterations, Shoppes at Burbank, LUK expansion, new Comfort Suites, Wooster Community Hospital, St. James Episcopal Church, AEP service center, Aspen Racquet Club, The Village Network, Campbell Oil Bell Store, Wooster City Schools, Wayne County Agricultural Museum, Pet Smart, Wooster Safety Center, Wooster Chamber of Commerce, Taco Bell, Planet Fitness, Westfield Bank, and others.
- **Completed Insurance Services Office (ISO) 2017 Building Department Review.** ISO is the leading supplier of statistical data to the insurance industry in the United States. They analyze the building code enforcement efforts to classify the effectiveness of the Building Division. Insurers can use the data provided by ISO to offer premium discounts to eligible Wooster properties.

# 2017 Plan Review, Permitting, and Inspection

## Activity Summary

The Division maintains certification as a State Certified Building Department with Certified personnel. As such, the Division deals directly with private architects, developers, contractors, property owners and others in carrying out the mission to protect the public. This work includes performing 250 plan reviews, issuing over 1,700 permits and conducting 3,000 construction inspections and another 2,150 existing property inspections.

- **1,700 permits** were issued, up again nearly 14% along with **3,000 construction inspections**.
- The total value of permitted **construction was nearly \$88 million**. This total was 12% less than last year's record of \$100,000,000.
- We collected **\$315,000 in fees**, up nearly 12%.
- **11 new single-family houses** were approved, and this is down 55% from each of the last several years.
- The Division used cloud-based online software to track the **testing of approximately 1,800 backflow prevention devices**.

# 2017 Property Maintenance Code Enforcement

## Activity Summary

Code enforcement is some of the most challenging work we do. It is undeniably difficult with imperfect results. But it is important work and can be satisfying because it not only protects public health and safety but also safeguards relationships between neighbors, beautifies our neighborhoods, and preserves property values.

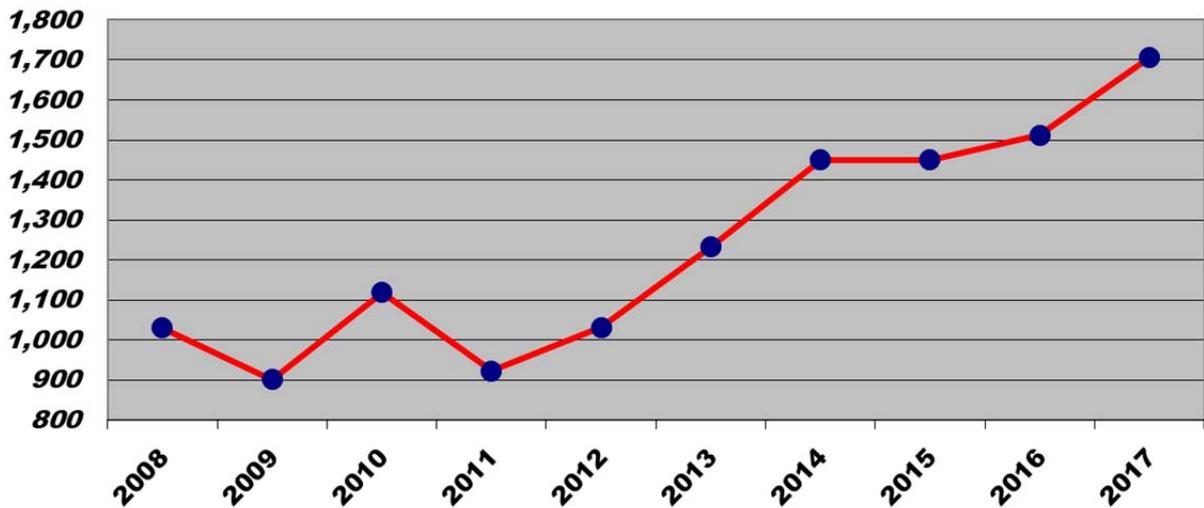
- We performed **2,155 maintenance code inspections**, and this is up 37% from 2016.
- We **inspected 1,429 different properties**.
- We identified **557 Property Maintenance and 268 Zoning Code violations**.
- A total of **9 houses were approved for demolition**.

## 2017 PERMIT ACTIVITY CONTINUES UPWARD TREND

In 2017, over 1,700 permits were issued, up again nearly 14% over what was an exceptional 2016 year. This is a strong four-year upward trend as the chart below shows.

Inspections were also up with 4,794 inspections conducted.

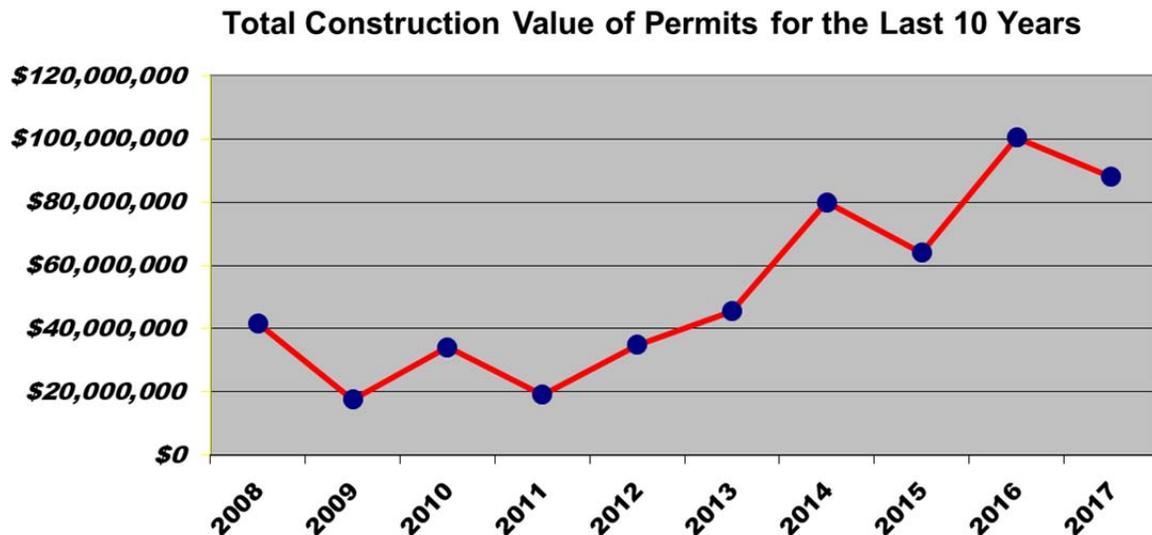
Number of Permits Issued Last 10 Years



During 2017, the Division reviewed and issued over 1,700 permits. These permits include residential and commercial building, electrical, plumbing, HVAC, and fire sprinkler and alarm permits. Also included in the figures are residential zoning permits (the division issues residential zoning permits). The last four years were record highs for permit issuance with 2017 the highest number on record.

## 2017 VALUE OF CONSTRUCTION CONTINUES OVERALL UPWARD TREND BUT DIPS FROM 2016

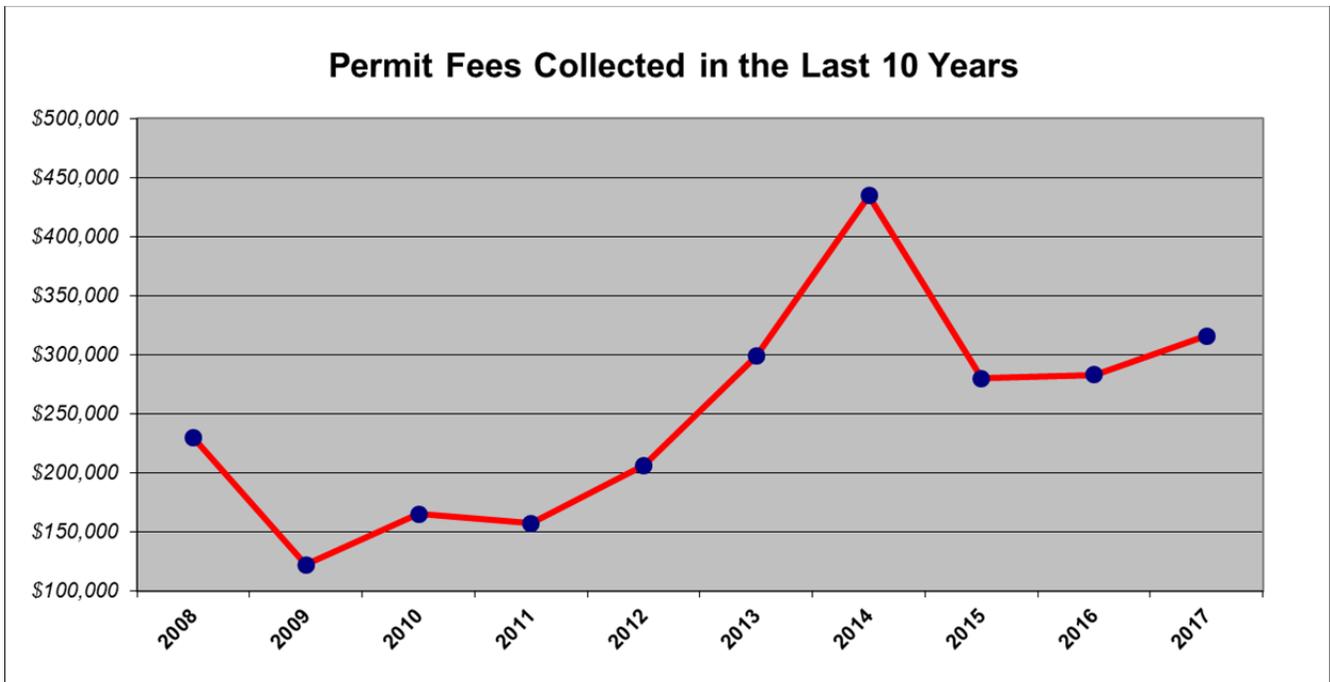
In 2017, the total value of construction was nearly \$88 million. This total was 12% less than last year. 2016 saw many large-scale projects permitted and this drove the number to an all-time high of \$100 million. Although this was below last year, it represents the third highest year ever.



Over the years, construction in the City of Wooster has certainly had its ups and downs. Before 2001, construction values remained fairly constant in the \$30 - \$40 million range. The years between 2001 through 2007 saw construction activity levels peak in the City with 2005 seeing nearly double the norm with \$90 million in value. The housing crisis represented the low point. The last four years were very high and **2016 we issued building permits on construction valued at \$100 million – a new all-time high. 2017 was the third highest year on record.**

## 2017 FEE COLLECTION CONTINUES 3 YEAR UPWARD TREND

In 2017, fees collected were up nearly 12% to over \$315,000. This increase is despite the fact that permit fees were lowered approximately 15% due to the efficiencies of the new cloud permitting process. Fees represent about two-thirds of budget expenses in line with our *revenue policy*.



The general mix of fees is 60% user fees and 40% general fund. This mix is part of a revenue policy developed by the Division and Administration and is reviewed periodically. The policy reflects the view that fees from permits should not subsidize code enforcement and the burden should be placed on the community as a whole.

In 2017 fees accounted for about two-thirds of the operating budget. Additional funds approved by Council to perform added demolitions and property maintenance abatement actions bring the percentage down, as fees are not collected for such actions.

## 2017 SINGLE FAMILY HOUSING STARTS DIP SIGNIFICANTLY FROM PREVIOUS 4 YEARS

In 2017, 11 new houses were approved. The previous five years saw 20 – 25 houses built each year. The reasons for this are complex and require further evaluation.



Housing has averaged **64 new units for the each of the ten years from 1999 – 2007**. Housing unit growth has paralleled the growth of the North End of the City as new subdivisions were built out at the same time as the North End developed.

For the years **2010 – 2016, Wooster averaged 23** new single-family houses. It appears that approximately 25 housing units/year has been a sustainable number in the City for the last several years.

In recent years, very few new subdivisions have been brought to the City for development. Only two residential subdivisions have developed in the last several years: Tartan Ridge and Crooked Creek. These, along with the Reserve at Deer Creek and the Meadows, have most of the available lots.

This is an area that merits further study with questions such as: Is there a pent-up demand or shortage of new single-family housing? Is the City providing adequate housing choices?

## **Top 8 projects in 2017**

1. Daisy Brand LLC  
New 110,000 sf addition
2. Lieben Wooster LP  
New Comfort Suites hotel 55,000 sf
3. The College of Wooster  
Stevenson Hall alterations
4. Goo Goo Express Wash  
New car wash
5. Wooster City Schools Board of Education  
New Early Education Center at Cornerstone
6. Aspen Grove Investments  
New 51,000 sf Aspen Racquet Club
7. St. James Episcopal Church  
Major addition
8. Wooster Place Inc.  
New Pet Smart tenant build out

## **Floodplain Administration**

Flooding has been a notorious cause of damage and life loss in the United States, with an average annual damage cost of \$6 billion and loss of 140 people. Floods can occur due to heavy rain, snowmelt, or a body of water overflowing, among other causes. The people and places affected by flooding are located in what is referred to as the floodplain.

Since standard homeowners insurance doesn't cover flooding, the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) offers flood insurance to homeowners, renters, and business owners if their community participates in the program. Participating communities agree to enforce and adopt ordinances that meet FEMA requirements to reduce the risk of flooding. In the spring of 2007, the City began participating in the National Flood Insurance Program with the adoption of the Flood Damage Reduction Ordinances. As if on cue, the City experienced a 100-year flood event in 2009 and another in 2010.

The NFIP standard for floodplain management is based on the 100-Year Flood. This is a flood event that has a 1 percent chance of occurring in any given year. An even larger flood is called the 500-Year Flood, which has a 0.2 percent chance of occurring every year. The last 500-Year Flood occurred in Wayne County on July 4, 1969, causing \$17,000,000 in damages and claiming the lives of 21 people.

On average, the City will issue 3 permits per year in the floodplain. Projects in the floodplain are required to build to higher standards including dry-flood proofing, raising the elevation of the lowest floor or other flood resistant methods. By limiting activity in these areas, flood damage risks are properly managed.

During 2017, the division conducted over 24 floodplain reviews and assisted property owners determine the base flood elevation of their properties.

## Backflow Prevention Program

Backflow can be described as “a reversal of the normal direction of flow within a piping system.” Contaminated water or other substances may flow from a property/building **into the distribution pipes** of the City’s potable water supply, causing contamination.

What our **Backflow Prevention Program** means to our customers is that once the potable water passes through the water meter into a facility, premise or home, it will be uncontaminated from other users. The backflow device protects other users from possible contamination.

Backflow and cross connections are covered by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under sections 3745 – 3795 of the Ohio Administrative Code and the City’s Utility Ordinances. Under these ordinances, commercial and industrial facilities are in need of an approved backflow device. Also, residential sites may be required to have protection based on use (for example residential irrigations systems).

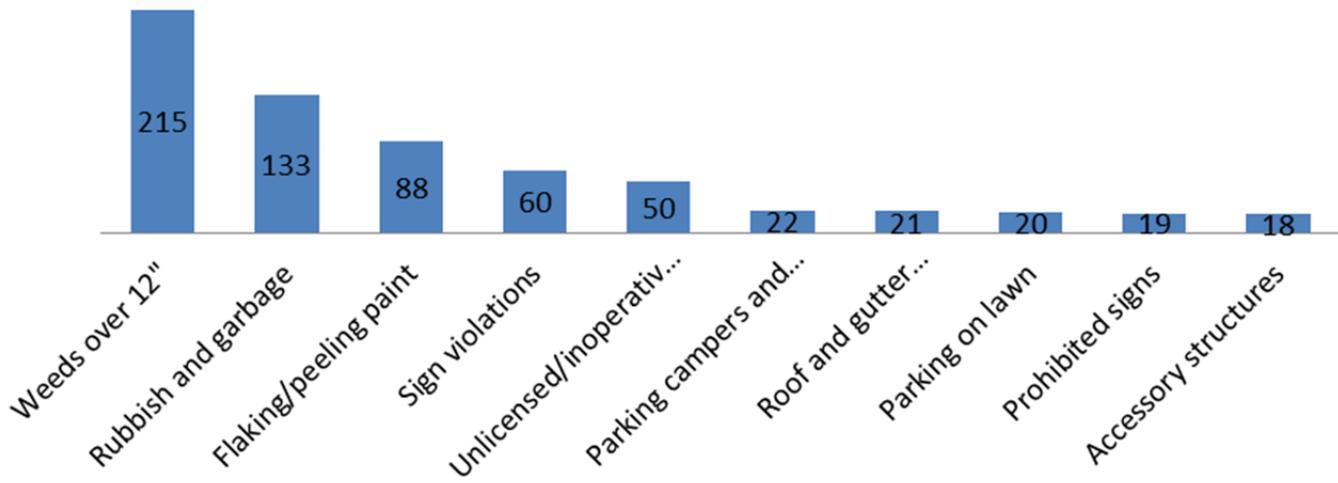
A survey/plan review is done for all new water connections and may be conducted at an existing site by the Program Coordinator (Scott Davis) at his discretion. Devices may be required based on this survey.

- During 2017, the **Division tracked the testing of approximately 1,800 devices** using the City’s online tracking system.
- The Division also conducted surveys and site visits to eliminate potential sources of cross-contamination.
- Additionally, the Division enforced the required testing of these devices. They are required by law to be tested annually.
- Also, the division required the installation of these devices on new and existing water service lines as stated in the law, particularly devices required to be installed on existing fire sprinkler supply lines.

## Property Maintenance Code Enforcement

We performed 2,155 Property Maintenance and Zoning Code inspections in 2017 resulting in 825 violations.

### 10 Most Common Violations of the 660 Property Maintenance Violations and 165 Zoning Code Violations

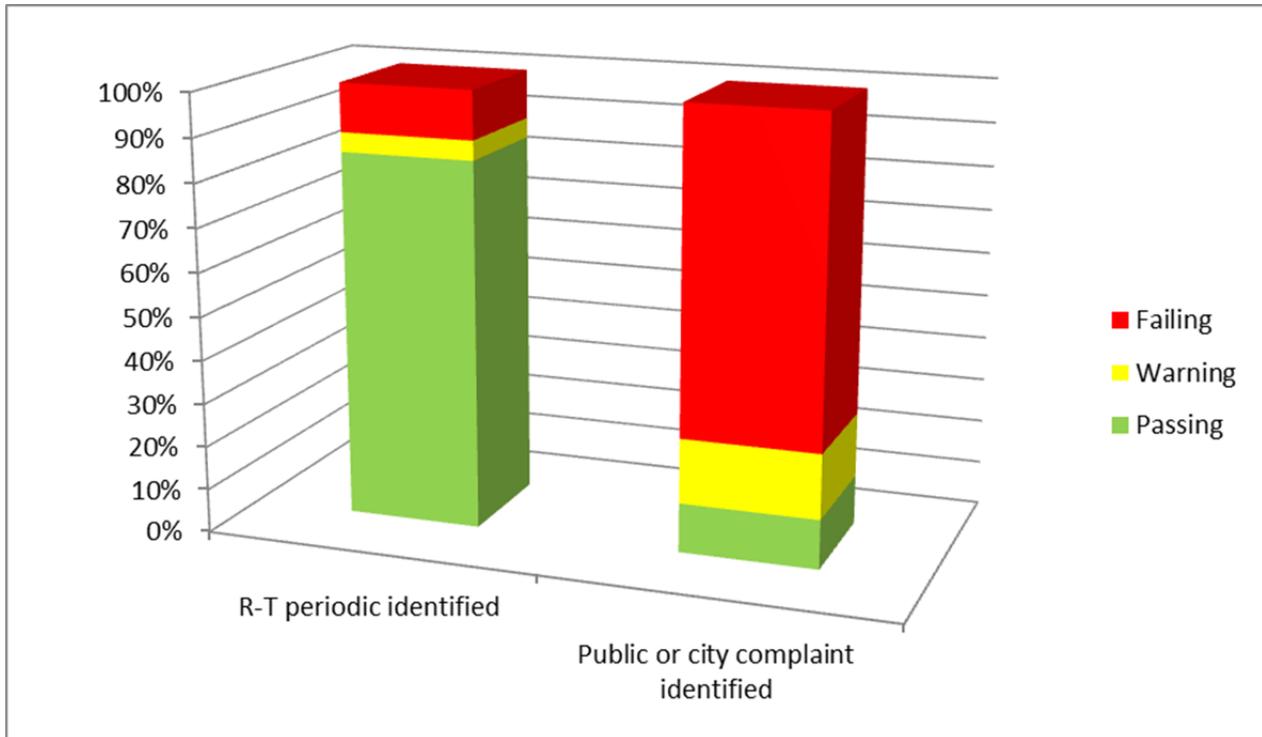


It is clear that an effective code administration program enhances the quality of life for the residents of Wooster in many ways. The program must include effective enforcement of the maintenance and zoning codes.

The 2,155 property maintenance and zoning code enforcement inspections are up from 1,576 during 2016. The increase is due to the cycle of the R-T Zoning District Periodic Inspection program. During 2017, we started over inspecting the 1,735 parcels in this district. This round of inspections was the second time through and as with the first time through in 2014; the inspection activity is higher during the initial year.

## We inspected 1,429 properties in 2017.

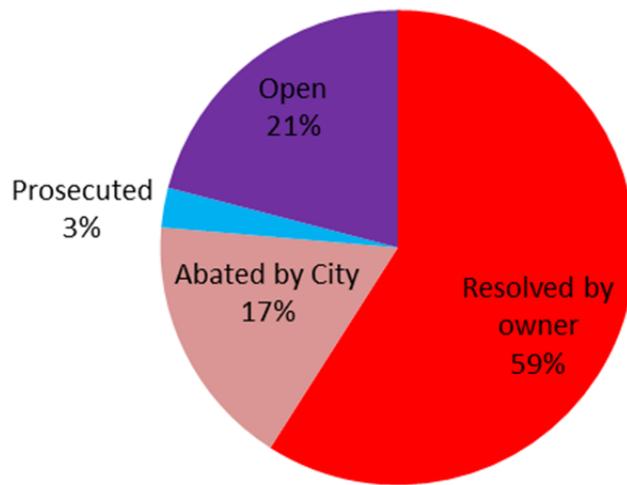
Most of the complaint-driven inspections resulted in a violation, while most of the proactive inspections resulted in no violation.



Although scheduled periodic inspections will result in a violation only about 20% of the time, they are effective in covering large areas and identifying violations that may go unreported. **Each type has advantages and limitations.**

**39%, or 557, properties had one or more Property Maintenance Code violations.**

### **Resolution of the 557 Properties with Violations**



60% (327) of the time, the owner resolved the issue/s.  
17% (96) of the time, the City hired contractors to abate the issue/s.  
3% (15) of the time, the City prosecuted the owner.  
21% (116) of the time, the violations are open and pending resolution.

## 2017 Demolitions

We approved nine houses for demolition.



## City of Wooster Building Standards Division

### 2017 Goal Setting and Action Planning

**Goal One:** Assist the Engineering Division to fully implement the Viewpoint cloud-based online permitting product.

**Status:** The Engineering Division has implemented Viewpoint for their permits, and they are all available as an online application and approval process.

**Goal Two:** Set up Viewpoint to administer the Parking permit/pass/lease program.

**Status:** All of the setup is complete, and the transition to online parking permits are in process. Notification of all of the stakeholders and should be completed early 2018.

**Goal Three:** Consult with the Human Resources Division to discuss the use of Viewpoint for internal processes, applications, etc.

**Status:** Preliminary conversations were started, but this work must be moved to 2018 due to time and staff constraints.

### 2018 Goal Setting and Action Planning

**Goal One:** Work with City Managers regarding utilization of Viewpoint cloud-based application software for their divisions. Make presentation outlining current use and possible further Citywide utilization.

**Goal Two:** Work with Viewpoint to continue improving the function of the current online permitting processes.

**Goal Three:** Complete update of Chapter 13 of the Codified Ordinances. This Building Code chapter needs a comprehensive update.

## **City of Wooster Building Standards Division Significant Prior Accomplishments**

- Assisted the Wayne County Commissioners with interviews and the selection of a new County Chief Building Official
- Hosted the following cities searching for best practices regarding code enforcement, downtown rehabilitation of buildings and improved customer service: Ohio cities of Steubenville, Mansfield, Upper Arlington and Hudson and cities from North Carolina and Rhode Island.
- Developed joint meeting with local code officials and the local Homebuilders Association to provide HBA members with code updates and education.
- Managed Larwill Trailer Park clean-up project and worked with the housing coalition and WMHA to assist with the relocation of all residents to improved housing.
- Managed the project to transfer the administration of the City's backflow valve testing program from a paper system to an online system. This included the online registration for tester certification and recording of mandatory annual tests. The City has over 1200 registered valves.
- Worked with Cleveland State University School for Professional Studies to streamline the plan review process. Used software updates and concurrent plan review to reduce the average review time to 21 days for complex projects.
- Began large format scanning and electronic archiving of all commercial plans since 2002.
- Developed "mutual consent" appeal process for commercial building code appeals for downtown businesses.
- Developed a system of updating and coordinating all lot information and address information with the Wayne County Auditor's records. This allowed the accurate identification of current owners, lot/parcel information, and addresses.

- During 2002-2005, initiated the discontinuance of the citywide “radio alarm box” fire alarm systems. These were unreliable and non-code compliant. This resulted in 220 commercial buildings upgrading to code-compliant fire alarm systems and the City no longer monitoring fire alarm systems with outdated equipment.
- Co-managed the municipal building’s \$1.7 million remodel project in 2002, the exterior bicentennial project in 2007 and the 2008 Schellin Park bicentennial monument project.
- Created the full-time position of Property Maintenance inspector during 2002. Created new R-T District periodic inspection program during 2013/14.
- Served on the WC Housing Coalition representing the City of Wooster since 2003.
- Ordered and worked with property owners on 42 structure demolitions during a 30 month period ending in 2014 utilizing 16 Moving Ohio Forward funds provided by the State. Served on the county-wide MOF committee.
- Served on the Howey House committee working in the N. Buckeye St. neighborhood. Worked to save the “Black” century home and secured funding for complete renovation. Initiated the replacement of sidewalks in the area and street tree trimming and replacement.
- Began a partnership with the local Homebuilders Association to provide members with code updates and education.
- Elected during a statewide election to serve as a director for the Ohio Building Officials Association.
- Awarded Building Official of the Year in 2005 by the Five County Building Officials Association representing 15 counties in NE Ohio.
- Received certification from the State of Ohio for Residential Building Department and all personnel during 2010.

***“The City of Wooster Building Standards Division staff is well trained, experienced, and committed to our mission of protecting the public and we are ready for the challenges of 2018.”***

Tim Monea	Chief Building Official Floodplain Administrator
Carla Jessie	Administrative Assistant Building Standards Division Planning and Zoning Division
Kim Fahrni	Electrical Inspector Commercial Building Inspector
Scott Davis	Plumbing and HVAC Inspector Backflow Valve Program Coordinator
Mark Nussbaum	Building Inspector Zoning Inspector
Justin Reed	Property Maintenance Inspector Zoning Inspector

Respectfully submitted by:

Tim Monea, CBO  
Building Standards Division Manager